

THE INVENTION OF INVENTION

JR Velasco, Columbia University

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Who among you has forgotten about the cousin? He is so eager to write the *Spanish Metamorphosis*, and the continuation of Polydore Vergil's *De inventoribus rerum*. He wants to tell you who the Giralda of Seville and the Fuente del Piojo were; he wants to enlighten you about the first person who ever had a cold, and the person who invented a medicine against syphilis. You probably remember that Sancho pulls his leg, asking him who was the first who scratched his head, or who was the one who preceded everybody else in turning a somersault. It's Sancho himself who gives the right answer -Adam and Lucifer, respectively. Don Quijote cannot believe that Sancho came up with the questions and answers on his own, but the squire retorts that he does not need any authority to talk nonsense.

"Más has dicho, Sancho, de lo que sabes -dijo don Quijote-que hay algunos que se cansan en saber y averiguar cosas que después de sabidas y averiguadas no importan un ardite al entendimiento ni a la memoria." (DQ 2. 22; ed. Rico, 813-14).

The cousin is simply possessed by the natural desire of knowledge with which Aristotle begins his *Metaphysics* (980a). He is powerfully driven by a sense of curiosity that means two different things: the urge to investigate things unbeknownst to him that he considers interesting (*curiosus*), and the parallel need to be careful, *curosus*,

in the ways in which he performs this investigation. The cousin may seem to us, and to don Quijote and Sancho, the epitome of those who fill the world with superfluous things, and as Nietzsche said,

"the superfluous is the enemy of the necessary [das Überflüssige der Feind des Notwendigen ist]. We need history, certainly, but we need it for reasons different from those for which the idler in the garden of knowledge needs it [als sie der verwöhnte Müßiggänger im Garten des Wissens braucht], even though he may look nobly down on our rough and charmless needs and requirements."¹

Finding out who was the first to invent a cup of glass and how it was used to contain wine may seem superfluous. It may very well look like the kind of knowledge that better fits in a vitrine to be publicly exhibited but rarely used, if at all.

The wine glass, however, is a very good case to examine. In fact, I chose it purposefully, of course. This example allows us to get into direct contact with the text I am going to be using as my primary source, Alfonso de Toledo's *Invencionario*, written some time between 1460 and 1467, and dedicated to Alonso Carrillo de Acuña, the Primate Cardinal of Spain and *factotum* of most of the crucial political events, most of them of a rare violence,

¹ Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life". *Untimely Meditations*. Daniel Breazeale, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy), 1997: 59.

that took place in the Iberian kingdoms between 1460 and 1482.

The Bachiller Alfonso de Toledo, an unexpected predecessor of both the cousin and Polydore Vergil, gives us indeed the origin of glass at the same time as he is writing about the invention of wine. Both inventions go hand in hand: wine gives him the ability to understand its dangers, and to explain who is forbidden from drinking it; the invention of glass, at its turn, gives him the opportunity to offer us the following account about how this material challenged the preeminence of other materials:

"Commo quier que segunt paresçe el vidrio non es saldo & mucho de ligero se quiebra pero ya se lee vn maestro aver presentado al emperador tiberio / vn vaso de vidrio E commo el en poco lo toujese lançolo en tierra el qual non se quebro mas bollose El maestro saco vn martillo que enel seño traya adobo el vaso commo si fuera de plata El emperador pregunto al maestro sy auja otro enel mundo que aquella arte sopiese & el rrespondio que non Entonçes el enperador mando lo matar porquel era muy avariento & avia mucho oro E si esta arte se sopiese que el vidrio se pudiese solidar commo otro metal valdria mas que oro & en su conparaçion seria rreputado por lodo." (BNM Mss/9219, 29^v; Gericke ed. 53)

Immediately afterwards, the combination of both inventions, offers our author the occasion to go beyond the fact of the

invention, and even beyond the short historical account, in order to reach into the world of irony and humor:

"ya seria tiempo de dar fin a esta materia del vino
salvo que me copellen los potadores que les diga
quando acaesçio que lloujese del çielo larga mente
pluuja de vino por que si verdat fue ternan esperança
que por ventura otra vez tornara a llouer // Ca de las
cosas que ya acaesçieron posible es qu[e] [o]tra vez
acaescan" (BNM Mss/9219, 29^v-30^r; Gericke ed. 53)

You have already guessed what I was trying to say. The invention of wine and glass are not just a way to establish a series of more or less curious facts. The narratives surrounding these inventions are also devised to give a hint of how they allow us, readers, to reach beyond the purported mission of this compilation -namely, registering inventions and inventors. In the first place, wine is not just an invention, something people found out; as our bachiller explains from the get go, wine is the result of extremely hard rural work, and it's also all the more valuable when we consider that the moment of consumption is separated from the beginnings of its production by months or even years and very hard physical and intellectual work (p.20). For him, the production of wine is the perfect example that "para mantener un hombre son necesarios mucho hombres" (21). Furthermore, talking about the invention of wine is also a way to talk about certain boundaries that have a social impact: virgins, for instance, cannot drink wine, because, as we are reminded by the story of no less a person as Noah, the day he was drunk as a skunk and showing off his holy genitalia, wine is an aphrodisiac. This may or

may not be sufficiently compelling, but the history of the invention of glass indeed is quite compelling. In this case, the political and economical reading is much more complex; the production of glass, and the knowledge about mastering glasswork, has a certain economic impact, so much so that it could have been the cause why the standard of wealth would have shifted from gold and silver, thus unbalancing the very Emperor's power -since the secret remained a secret, Tiberius could still preserve the value of his capital, and the gold standard itself. Finally, the invention of wine and the glass of wine is a window to a piece of history beginning with humor, a collective of ghost drinkers asking for a rainfall of wine, in order to focus on two sacred stories that permit the author to evoke particular miracles from different sources, evangelical and others (p. 53), thus establishing the very metaphysics of wine -the very same quality that makes it a central element in the miracle of communion, once it becomes blood².

A good question, here, would be not how and from what sources this work was compiled -something that will interest us for other reasons-but what is the intellectual contribution of the invention of invention. Or, in other words, we can ask why create a body of temporal and sacred knowledge from the perspective of invention? In this sense, what we need to understand is what kind of epistemological device or epistemological claim is the concept of invention and how it encompasses an idea and practice of research. This is what I intend to focus on in this paper.

² Gil Anidjar. *Blood*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015.

The bibliography about Alfonso de Toledo's *Invencionario* fits in a thimble. Philipp Otto Gericke published it in 1967 and 1992, after reading an article about Raúl del Piero published in 1962; Gericke's edition garnered two reviews, one by Francisco Marcos Marín, and another one by Juan Carlos Conde López; Concepción Salinas Espinosa presented a paper in Alcalá, 1992, giving a general description of the external elements of the work, and then mentioned it also *en passant* in his book about Alfonso de la Torre's *Visión deleytable*; José Luis Herreros published an article in 1995 about the "order of knowledge" in the *Invencionario*, to demonstrate that it was a witness of the transition between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance -and, along the way, he gave a wrong date for its composition. In the 2000's, the work was the object of an entry in the *Diccionario Filológico de Literatura Medieval*, by my dear friend Fernando Gómez Redondo, who also devoted to the work pages 3702-3717 of his monumental *Historia de la Prosa Medieval Castellana* (2007). As always, Gómez Redondo wraps up what we know about the work, relocates it in its historical moment (the literary and intellectual circle of Alonso Carrillo), and corrects some details, while giving us a general taste of the text. I remember very well my first acquaintance with this text in 1993, for a paper I presented while I was a graduate student in Paris. I got a good grade, thank you.

It is slightly perplexing this lack of interest for a work of which we know twelve manuscripts that have been heavily used, and we are sure of the existence -and vanishing- of three more. I would also like to mention that we know of another one -a sixteenth manuscript,

corresponding to the *exemplar* prepared by Alfonso de Toledo himself, in which all the bibliographical references were in the margins, as he himself explains in the concluding chapter of his work. None of the extant manuscripts corresponds to the layout with which it was first conceived -or invented-and, as happened in many other occasions, the scribes decided that it was much easier to migrate all marginal information to the center of the manuscript, thus confusing the main text with the originally marginal *cotaciones* and glosses. In a sense, this only matters a bit, because successive readers from the second half of the fifteenth century left dozens of reading marks, references, *ordinationes*, and longer glosses, on the margins of Alfonso de Toledo's work. In other words, the *Invencionario* is not only one of the most read treatises of the second half of the fifteenth century, but also one that has received more marginal interactions from many different readers on the surface of the twelve extant manuscripts. [SOME SLIDES] If nothing else, the work should have generated some curiosity.

And in fact it did. Some of those *inventions* registered by the bachiller were also re-used in some other texts of the period, including almost *verbatim* references by the translator of Guido de Cauliaco's *Chirurgia*, who included a mention about the invention of the *tristel* (basically a system to administer enemas, which may very well explain the very descriptive name in Spanish), based on the bio-mimicry of the way in which the stark purges itself -you really don't want to know. Also, Antonio de Nebrija seems to follow Alfonso de Toledo in his chapter about the invention of letters in his *Gramática*. It is

quite easy to find the impact of the reading of the *Invencionario* in the late fifteenth century, but it would not be much more difficult to see its presence in other sixteenth century *polyantheae*, including Pedro Mexía's *Silva de varia lección* -even though Mexía knew the two editions of Polydore Vergil's *De inventoribus*, 1499 and 1521.

In other words, a case about the *Invencionario* is not just a matter of mere curiosity. It is in fact a compelling case about one vernacular treatise on how to manage scholarly information in a way that is, at the same time, useful, and funny, as "omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci / lectorem delectando pariterque monendo." However, this case is not a sufficient reason to simply stand here and tell you how interesting and funny this treatise is, and how unjustly it has been treated by our literary historian forefathers, and that it is time for us to celebrate its interest and so on and so forth. I am not going to do that -perhaps I already did, using the old art of preterition.

Alfonso de Toledo puts into circulation two different concepts that constitute the backbone of his text. On the one hand, he does explore the concept of invention. Invention is a very recent word in Spanish at the time he is writing. It would be possible to trace its origins to two different traditions that are almost contemporary to our bachiller. On the one hand the knightly tradition of the *invençión*, which refers to the combination of image and text sported by literary and real knights in jousts and tournaments, and whose poetic fortune can be easily

explored among the thousands of *cancionero* poems. The second one is closely related to this knightly concept, as it has the same rhetorical origin -Alonso de Cartagena's translation of book 1 of Cicero's *De inventione*. The first uses of the noun *invention* in Spanish can be traced back to the years in which these two traditions first start. The word has a very long history in Latin, and, as a matter of fact one could very well affirm -examining the linguistic data-that Alfonso de Toledo is not even considering the Spanish tradition of the word, but rather creating a new semantic for a noun that he is directly translating from Latin. True that he is not translating one single noun, but rather reconducting a whole semantic field into one single noun. For instance, when he translates Petrus Comestor's *incidentia* in which he speaks about the invention of torture and the instruments of torture, he establishes the synonymy between "excogitar" and "inventar", as the *Historia Scholastica* reads:

"In diebus Cyri septimus rex Romanorum Tarquinius Superbus, qui causa Tarquini Junioris filii, sui, qui Lucretiam corruerat, a regno expulsus est. Hic genera tormentorum excogitavit, vincula, taureas fustes, latumias, carceres, compedes, catenas, exsilia, metalla." (PL col. 1474d)

The regime of synonymy comes most probably from the very definition of invention given by Cicero in his *De invention*, which is

"excogitatio rerum verarum aut veri similibus quae causam probabilem reddant."

In other words, what Alfonso de Toledo is offering is not only the reinvention of the old and by then almost forgotten tradition of *heurematography*, but rather a treatise of what does it mean to scream εὐρηκα: what is an invention, what is the world of inventions, how many ways are there to talk about inventions, what is the literary style appropriate to narrate inventions, how to find out what is an invention, and what is the semantic field of invention. And, of course, what are the conditions of possibility, the historical opportunities, and the consequences of inventing.

There is absolutely no way that that I can reel off every single argument related to each of those ideas. There would be too much to say, not enough time. But I think I can make my point if I simply follow one lead -the juridical taste of the very concept of invention-and try to explain one of the inventive plots that crosses the treatise. First of all, let me clarify that the juridical taste I refer to is related to the previous definition of *inventio* from Cicero: inventing is not only about reasoning and finding out true or likely arguments, but also to work them out so that they allow the orator (or the dictator) to present the right proofs for the cause in point. Alfonso de Toledo is, indeed, a bachiller, that is a lesser kind of lawyer, who introduces himself as a dictator -an expert in the arts of dictating and writing letters.

He has taken the time to establish a series of stylistic paradigms for his *dictamen*. Very quickly, he divided the treatise in two parts, one devoted to temporal

inventions and the other one devoted to spiritual ones. Each part is divided in ten particles, each of which encompasses several chapters. Each part, as well, has its own measure of time; for the temporal part he has chosen the structure of the six ages of mankind, and for the second one the model of the *traditio legis*, that is the period of the law of nature, the period of the law of scripture, and the period of the law of grace. His style as a dictator is noteworthy because of the pleasure he seems to be taking out of his work; he is constantly trying to find a balance between brevity and clarity, with a rhetorical variety of humor that involves the whole organization of the book. For instance, it is frequent for him to show us how the next particle is already pressing him to finish the current one, using the trope of anthropomorphism: it is easy to read

"Ya es tiempo que oyamos la razon de la Particula Nouena, a quien la Octaua, con su soberuia ha vn rato enbaraçado; la qual nos ha prometido declarar los inuentores de algunas artes que los ombres ynuentaron..." (fol. 41v; p. 71)

This play with the particles who get in the way of the other particles, or claim their right to be listened to, etc., is combined with his ability to name some chapters in ways that could not be clearer, like the one titled "De vna vtil compendiosa diuision nesçesaria para declaracion de lo ynfra notado" (96), or "En que permite alguna diuision para adelante" (140). From the very beginning Alfonso de Toledo has decided that he will be making the text "agradable", and this is basically what he is doing: parsing some

variety not only in the kind of stories and inventions he is telling, but also in the way he is doing it.

However, this style, bubbly and crispy in many occasions, should not distract us from the bachiller's interest in bringing up some real concepts and questions. All four or five scholars who have actually read, and bothered to write about the *Invencionario* have more or less repeated the same tune -it is a *medieval* work, not even close to the good and fruitful *humanistic* endeavors, better represented by, for instance, Polydore Virgil, the fellow heuromatographer from Urbino. The sources used by Alfonso de Toledo are the proof: Petrus Comestor, Uguccio da Pisa, Accursius, Isidore -god forbid- of Seville, Gratian, and others of the same ilk. Medieval medievals from the medieval middle ages. I am not going to deny it. I am just going to deny that this actually means anything at all. What really means something is whether he brings up all those sources and inventions for some particular purpose. And I think the purpose is the very concept of research, *investigación*, that is the semantic mantra of Alfonso de Toledo's work. This is the endeavor: if we want to know about our institutions, customs, laws, and in general about which are the inventions and findings that identify our culture, we need to set in motion a series of researches. This is what matters: research, and a way to make this research transparent.

The verb *investigar* is quite recent in Spanish. It appears with Enrique de Villena, who becomes the champion of investigating, not for himself, but in the benefit of the "curosos leedores" (Cátedra ed. Villena, *Eneida*).

Madrid: Turner, 1994, p. 449). The activity of intellectual research called *investigación* constitutes a new trend in cultural production during the fifteenth century, one that Villena and the whole world of the city and network of Cuenca intellectuals -like Villena himself, or Alonso Carrillo de Acuña, the interlocutor of Alfonso de Toledo- were very eager to practice in many different ways. They not only wanted to let people know things, but also to establish a valid series of methods and intellectual inquiry called *investigación*. *Invención* and *investigación* go hand in hand in Alfonso de Toledo's intellectual activity.

But why *investigación*. True, every single page of Alfonso de Toledo uses the verb *investigar* or the noun *investigación* at least once in each page. In my opinion, however, this interest in research is not independent from his legalistic view of the world. Research is, above all, judicial and legal research. The whole *Invencionario* is fundamentally about legal institutions, or about the legal uses of certain bodies of knowledge. He is interested in the invention of the letters, scripts, and writing materials because they are extremely useful for legal purposes, or, in other words, because they constitute juridical memory -that is, *archive*. If he devotes time to those issues it is because they have legal consequences: investigating the invention of letters, scripts, the order of writing (from boustrophedon to plain unidirectional) and writing materials, allows him to establish the basic and original legal library, including, of course, the Bible itself.

Legal and juridical inventions and investigation is a central part of what Alfonso de Toledo does. In the *exemplar*, now lost, the bachiller included all the references or *remissions* on the margins, in addition to the final chapter in which he explains the sources he has used, and the way he has used them. He is proposing a genealogy of those inventions, in order to demonstrate that they can be traced back to sources that are eminently juridical - including Petrus Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*, frequently used as a legal historical text as much as a text about legal history. In a certain way, the work itself is an *inquest*, a *pesquisa*, or, if you prefer the latin technical noun, an *inquisitio*.

Inquisitio is research in its purest state. Contrary to accusatorial models, *inquisitio* does not depend on anybody denouncing anybody. It is strictly a necessity to know, to search, to find out -to invent. As Michel Foucault explained in his lectures on "La vérité et les forms juridiques", the *inquest* is a "processus de gouvernement", and this is the reason why it occupies a prominent space in legal discussions. As a matter of fact, Alfonso de Toledo, who is particularly interested in some institutions, reduces his legal history to three problems: the invention of legal codifications, the invention of witnessing as a means of investigation, and, immediately afterwards, the invention of the *inquisitio* or *pesquisa*. This is, I would argue, where the interest in the double device of invention and investigation arrives at its theoretical peak. Writing and legal research reaches one particular way of government based on the *inquest*, that is, the constant process of research in the legal and political domains without the

mediation of any denouncement whatsoever, strictly based on what Alfonso de Toledo translates as the "fama clamante". "Fama clamante" is the juridical and judicial effect produced by a strange agent which can be described as public knowledge, opinion, and intrigue. This is the kind of judicial process that entails the use of witnesses, who, as Alfonso de Toledo says, are "instrumento para la investigación de la verdat", and if they came about as such essential pieces of investigation it is precisely because they originated in the very world of inquisition.

Like many other authors in his time, Alfonso de Toledo is interested in finding out the origins of the inquisition as a procedural system and as a governmental process. This is a question that many intellectuals were wondering. They knew that the legal origins of modern inquisition could be located in the third and fourth lateran councils. Iberian lawyers, furthermore, knew that Alfonso X had implemented an extremely original vernacular, civil and royal inquisition in his *Third Partida*. Still, they considered that the inquisition, the inquest, was a system of research set in motion by god not for him to know or to discover, but for establishing a superstructural of self-inquest among humans, who would thus take care of their own production of "fame" -and this is pretty much how Alfonso de Toledo explains is. Another manuscript, almost contemporary of the bachiller's work, and definitely contemporary of many of his readers, introduces a gloss underneath an image of the story of Cain and Abel, in which the anonymous glossator offers as well his or her take on the origins of the inquisition [SLIDE]:

[ass]i como abel fue muerto
[di]os como aquel que no se le as
[co]nde nada. Pregunto a cayn
[que] es de tu hermano abel &
[ca]yn respondio quel non era gu
[ar]da de abel que non sabia. & Di
[xo] dios la su sangre llama
[an]te mi. Estonçe dixo cayn
[por] el peccado que he fecho que
[qu]al quien que me fallare que me
[m]late./ E dixo dios non assy
[m]as quien a ti matare que aya
[do]ble peccado que tu. E dixo ca
[yn] tan grande es el mi pe
[cca]do que non meresco aver perdon
[e] por esto que de suso dize que la
[sa]ngre de cayn llama ante
[si]. La justizia puede fazer
[in]quisiçion & pesquisa de ley di
[vi]na sobre algund maleficio
[que] sea fecho sin dar querella. (BNM Mss/1518, 30v)

"Fama clamante" and the absence of a previous "querella" is what makes important research and the legally loaded concept of invention as "excogitatio" -that is, as the ability to articulate the truthful and the likely in order to present a proof during the judicial process. It is a powerful system of centralization of government, one that allowed for the configuration of a system of surveillance and an ability to listen to the claims of fame. If it had been fruitful -albeit rarely used-in civil causes during the 13th century, during the second half of the fifteenth

century it would become the center of gravity of a new jurisdictional power, or, as Bradin Cormack said, a power to do justice.

Curiosity is a very tricky notion. It can be easily judged a superficial interest in varied things that do not amount to anything other than an idle walk in the garden of knowledge. It would be difficult to understand, for instance, that today's public intellectuals or public humanists would be driven by curiosity alone. We would need to articulate something more -moral philosophies, as Butler suggests in her *Giving an account of oneself*-that can make the whole conversation relevant. I don't think it was different in the past, when researching, writing, translating, and disseminating knowledge was not something anybody could take for granted.

Alfonso de Toledo was, indeed, a curious guy. But he was doing something with his curiosity. He was, for instance, researching and translating. He was focusing on particular themes and institutions, and giving a legal and juridical reading of them -he, as he confesses, has very little theology to forget, so even theological inventions are, for here, legal achievements. He was indeed articulating a series of arguments with which to feed a political conversation that occupied an important part of public life, in peace and war, during the second half of the fifteenth century, and in particular after the Toledo revolts against the Jews in 1455: whether the inquisitorial system was not just a religious system, but also a civil and political governmental process.

Invention and *investigation* are two crucial concepts that allow our bachiller to discover arguments to feed some of the debates that were taking place in public life, and, in particular, in such a powerful space as that surrounding the Primate of Spain and Isabel supporter, Alonso Carrillo de Acuña. Alfonso de Toledo was not only the discoverer of those arguments, he also put them in the vernacular, so that they could be consistently used among those in charge of governing the kingdom after a succession of civil wars and other *banderías*.

Not heuristics, but, rather, the politics of heuristics. The invention of invention is, in fact, the invention of investigation: invention as epistemological device is the way to introduce the action that does not need of any sort of hint, denouncement, or accusation, but that unfolds and releases research. Of course, such investigation is no less than a much more perverse sort of curiosity: the inner thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of those new subjects of an inquisition.